

# Strategy Research Project

## Embedding Mission Command in Army Culture

by

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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## **Abstract**

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## **Embedding Mission Command in Army Culture**

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### **Auftragstaktik and Mission Command Doctrine**

Mission command traces its roots back to the German concept of Auftragstaktik, which translates roughly to mission-type tactics.<sup>1</sup> Auftragstaktik held German commissioned and noncommissioned officers duty bound to accomplish missions within the parameters of a stated intent, through the application of personal initiative, innovation, and critical thinking.<sup>2</sup> However, for many Army leaders, Auftragstaktik means nothing more than its literal translation, "mission type orders," or orders giving great latitude to subordinates.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, a more in depth description of this German concept is necessary.

The most reliable source available to explain Auftragstaktik is the modern day German Army based on its connection to the originators of the concept.<sup>4</sup> According to Bundeswehr officers, Auftragstaktik is comprised of four essential elements: obedience, proficiency, independence of action, and self-esteem. All four must be present for the concept to exist.<sup>5</sup> Obedience underscores Auftragstaktik, and refers to strict adherence to a commander's intent (purpose, method, endstate).<sup>6</sup> Proficiency refers to technical and tactical competence and includes the ability to synchronize warfighting functions, which is reinforced by rigorous professional development.<sup>7</sup> Independence of action is the heart of Auftragstaktik, as the higher commander provides subordinates a great deal of latitude in executing the mission, thereby enabling them to seize the initiative as it presents itself.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, self-esteem is emboldened through rigorous training programs and fostered by the application of initiative without fear of retribution for failure. Within this construct, self-confidence is created because mistakes are accepted as an integral part of leader development.<sup>9</sup> These elements elevate the concept of Auftragstaktik to more than an idea or operational term. Rather, it is a distinct and defining characteristic of culture.

Many of the aspects that define Auftragstaktik are evident in existing Army doctrine on mission command. The Army's corps concept; unified land operations, describes how the Army seizes, retains, and exploits initiative to gain and maintain a position of relative advantage in sustained land operations, achieved through simultaneous offensive, defensive, and stability operations in order to prevent or deter conflict, prevail in war, and create conditions favorable for conflict resolution.<sup>10</sup> Unified

land operations are executed through decisive action, enabled by Army core competencies, and guided by mission command.<sup>11</sup>

Mission command philosophy is the first component of unified land operations, and is defined as the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission type orders to enable disciplined initiative within commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders.<sup>12</sup> To assist commanders and their staffs in balancing the art of command and the science of control, mission command incorporates six fundamental principles; build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide a clear commander's intent, exercise disciplined initiative, use mission orders, and accept prudent risk.<sup>13</sup>

These six principles are executed through the second component of Unified Land Operations; mission command warfighting functions, which are related tasks and systems that develop and integrate activities and allow commanders to integrate warfighting functions.<sup>14</sup> Finally, mission command is executed through the third component, mission command systems that enhance a commander's ability to conduct operations.<sup>15</sup> Commanders organize mission command systems to support decision making; collect, create, and maintain relevant information; and prepare knowledge products to provide a greater degree of understanding and visualization. These systems also allow commanders to prepare directives; communicate and collaborate, and facilitate the functioning of teams.<sup>16</sup> In applying these four overlapping functions, commanders arrange the five components of mission command systems: personnel, networks, information systems, processes and procedures, and facilities and

equipment.<sup>17</sup> Together, mission command philosophy and mission command warfighting functions guide, integrate, and synchronize Army forces during unified land operations.<sup>18</sup>

### The Emerging Operating Environment

Existing Army doctrine and recent history provide a foundation for enacting and embracing mission command. The future operating environment, however, may pose a threat to the Army's ability to embrace this concept. The global geostrategic environment is influenced by two interrelated trends: the pace of change due to globalization, and the preeminence of the United States as the lone, comprehensive superpower.<sup>19</sup> Defined broadly, globalization is the process of growing international activity in many areas that create ever-closer ties, enhanced interdependence, and greater opportunity and vulnerability for all.<sup>20</sup> In addition to these two trends, the 2010 National Security Strategy notes the two decades since the end of the Cold War have been marked by both the promise and perils of change.<sup>21</sup> During this complex period, ideologically driven wars have given way to wars over religious, ethnic, and tribal identity.<sup>22</sup> Further, climate change and resource scarcity increase the likelihood of humanitarian crises and instability, nuclear dangers have proliferated, and inequality and economic instability have intensified. Damage to our environment, food insecurity, and dangers to public health are increasingly shared, and the same tools that empower individuals to build, enable them to destroy.<sup>23</sup>

The international security environment is becoming more uncertain due to widening economic inequality, along with a global jihadist insurgency with anti-Western ideology that will continue to vex and challenge global stability.<sup>24</sup> Threats to the U.S. homeland, critical infrastructure, and deployed forces will continue to evolve and diversify.<sup>25</sup> Countering weapons of mass destruction or mass effect will prove

increasingly difficult, and the probability of such weapons coming into the hands of terrorists will increase significantly.<sup>26</sup> While Europe and Latin America will remain stable, violent extremists with long-held grievances will fuel instability in the Middle East and South Asia.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, a rising China and India will reshape power dynamics in Asia which, while stable, retains worrisome flashpoints on the Korean Peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait.<sup>28</sup> Russia and Central Asia face the challenge of political modernization and weak state institutions, and Africa will remain outside the mainstream of economic globalization and will continue to struggle with serious problems such as AIDS, terrorism, and internal conflict.<sup>29</sup>

The confluence of these factors will require the Army to execute an array of operations ranging from maintaining presence and engagement to peacekeeping, humanitarian relief, and crisis intervention.<sup>30</sup> Balancing these requirements will prove challenging given budget cuts and automatic reductions under sequestration that will further deplete an Army stretched to the limits after a decade of war. Under the current plan, the Budget Control Act identifies \$487 billion in defense cuts over the next 10 years. If the government fails to resolve the ongoing sequestration debate, defense department cuts will total \$1.2 trillion. Even more concerning are the immediate and across the board Fiscal Year 2013 Department of Defense reductions totaling \$47.2 billion.<sup>31</sup> More specifically, the Budget Control Act mandates \$170 billion in Army spending cuts over the next decade, and the Army already faces an \$18 billion shortfall in operation and maintenance accounts, including an additional \$6 billion reduction in programs due to the continuing resolution and the sequester.<sup>32</sup> For fiscal year 2014 and beyond, sequestration will result in the loss an additional 100,000 personnel, including

Active Army and Reserve Component Soldiers. Combined with previous cuts, this will result in a total reduction of at least 189,000 personnel from the force.<sup>33</sup>

Senior Army leaders understand the challenge facing the Army, as evidenced by General Dempsey's description of three key transitions. The first transition involves resetting the force for a multitude of evolving, complex, and uncertain security challenges.<sup>34</sup> The second transition centers on a shift from unconstrained budgets consistent with the past decade to smaller ones, further exacerbated by the ongoing fiscal impasse.<sup>35</sup> Lastly, with the mission in Iraq complete and the ongoing drawdown of forces in Afghanistan, the Army will transition from sustained combat operations to operations in garrison environments.<sup>36</sup>

While all three key transition points are worrisome, arguably the last is most concerning because the Army has a generation of junior leaders that are comfortable in Counterinsurgency (COIN) environments. During the last decade of war, these leaders were afforded unprecedented flexibility and authority to operate, and were provided virtually unconstrained resources.<sup>37</sup> Most significantly, they were empowered within the framework of mission command. However, these autonomous and adaptive junior Army leaders possess limited or atrophied garrison skills, and have no notion of training and preparing units for combat with constrained resources. This same cohort of junior leaders faces the challenge of caring for and leading a growing population of high risk (alcohol, drugs, suicide, sexual assault) and injured service members (combat wounds, post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury), with troubled personal relationships stressed by multiple deployments. They will also be required to assist Soldiers and family members transitioning from military to civilian life.

The complex nature of garrison environments will also prove difficult for senior leaders for two factors. First, the Army will face increased scrutiny from external stakeholders that have jurisdiction over the Army, particularly Congress. This governing entity will exert increased oversight of diminishing resources, and will hold senior Army leaders accountable for the effective employment of these resources. Second, Congress will continue to pay close attention to the health, welfare, and physical and mental well-being of service members. The American population will hold both governmental officials and the military accountable by demanding good stewardship of both material resources and human capital. Given these two key factors, senior Army leaders must decide whether to employ micro-management and other constraining leadership practices in managing this complexity, or continue to empower and provide junior leaders the flexibility and autonomy that allowed the Army to achieve success during the past decade of war.

This research effort argues that the six fundamental principles associated with mission command (build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide clear commander's intent, exercise disciplined initiative, use mission orders, and accept prudent risk) best allow the Army to manage this complexity. Central among these principles is the ability to build cohesive teams through mutual trust, and if trust across the Army is "the bedrock of the profession," then this critical attribute is the element of mission command that may hold the key to its success.<sup>38</sup>

## Trust

Webster's New International Dictionary defines trust as assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something; one in which confidence is placed. This concise definition does not fully capture the true essence of the type of trust required to implement mission command, therefore, several descriptions of trust within other career fields and academia warrant examination.

Dennis and Michelle Reina, authors of *Trust and Betrayal in the Workplace*, developed a model of trust which provides an organizational roadmap describing what they term "transaction trust," based on the key elements of honesty, transparency, admission of mistakes and communicating with good purpose.<sup>39</sup> Trust between people within organizations is based on the perception that efforts between individuals will be reciprocated, and that reactions will be predictable and produce a sense of security for all stakeholders.<sup>40</sup> In his book, *Speed of Trust*, Dr. Stephen Covey expresses the idea that trust is "the hidden variable" in the formula for organizational success.<sup>41</sup> The phrase, "the speed of trust," captures the idea that trust affects two outcomes in any organization: speed and cost.<sup>42</sup> Trust engenders high speed and low cost ("the cost dividend"); lack of trust has the opposite outcome ("the trust tax").<sup>43</sup> Most importantly, high trust materially improves communication, collaboration, execution, innovation, strategy, engagement, partnering, and relationships with all stakeholders.<sup>44</sup> Many of these "trust effects" have tremendous application within the Army and provide a more comprehensive evaluation of trust within the context of mission command.

During commissioning and every subsequent promotion ceremony, officers are reminded of the importance of two special words, "trust and confidence." Senior military and civilian leaders advocate that trust is the foundation for success in any organization.



The Profession of Arms White Paper acknowledges trust as “clearly the most important attribute we seek for the Army.”<sup>45</sup> Just as understanding informs a commander’s intent, trust informs the execution of that intent. This essential requirement is further expanded on in Army Doctrine and Publications (ADRP) 6-0, Mission Command. ADRP 6-0 defines trust as shared confidence between commanders, subordinates, and partners. The publication goes on to note, effective commanders build cohesive teams in an environment of mutual trust, and there are few shortcuts in gaining trust. Developing trust takes time, and it must be earned. Trust takes hold in a unit when leaders uphold Army values and apply Army leadership principles.<sup>46</sup>

Trust is fragile, and there are systemic indicators of an emerging trust gap within the Army. Several research studies reveal a lack of trust in leadership as a significant factor that causes service members to leave the military.<sup>47</sup> Recent failings of military leaders at all levels, coupled with sensational Soldier misconduct in garrison and while deployed reflect poorly on the entire Army and undermine trust within the institution and with the public.

A recent 2010 *Center for Army leadership Annual Survey* reveals that about one in five Army leaders are viewed negatively by their subordinates, and most believe they have interacted with toxic leaders.<sup>48</sup> The presence of toxic leaders in the force may create a self-perpetuating cycle which has harmful and long-lasting effects on morale and productivity, and prevents the retention of quality personnel.<sup>49</sup> A failure to address toxic leadership coupled with the perceived inequity of punishment for senior leader misconduct in comparison to lower ranking Soldiers further exacerbates a lack of organizational trust in the Army. Furthermore, toxic leadership does not enable mission

command because it compels and coerces subordinates into compliance as opposed to stimulating initiative, creativity, and commitment.

Trust is embedded in values that guide decision making and behavior patterns that are deeply rooted in Army culture. Therefore, the Army must take action to promote factors that facilitate trust, while simultaneously addressing those factors that widen the perceived and actual trust gap in the Army. Both of these requirements are essential in advancing mission command, and will require senior leaders to examine cultural factors that contribute to both extremes.

### An Examination of Organization Culture

If trust is the foundation for the Army Profession, then culture is the concept that binds the fibers of our organization together. Edgar H. Schein defines culture as, “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that are learned by a group as it solved problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which have worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, inform new members how to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.”<sup>50</sup> More simply, “organizational culture can be broadly defined as the symbols rituals, and practices which give meaning to the activity of the organization.”<sup>51</sup> According to Schein, culture is formed when leaders impose their own values and assumptions on a group.<sup>52</sup>

A comprehensive examination of culture and leadership reveals that these two concepts are two sides of the same coin, and neither operates independently.<sup>53</sup> For example, while cultural norms influence how organizations view leaders, leaders create and manage the same culture that defines them.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, if leaders create culture, it is the responsibility of leaders to change culture if it is determined dysfunctional.<sup>55</sup> This dynamic distinguishes leadership from management within the context of culture

because leaders create and change culture, while management simply acts within a culture.<sup>56</sup> This thought does not imply that culture is easy to create or change, and it does not infer that leaders exclusively influence culture.<sup>57</sup> Conversely, culture is determined by elements within an organization that are stable and malleable.<sup>58</sup>

Organizational cultural awareness (understanding that culture shapes beliefs, behaviors, and norms and embeds underlying assumptions) is important for all members of an organization, and is essential for leaders. Leaders establish and reinforce organizational values that affect behaviors exhibited by an organization.<sup>59</sup> If an organization achieves success and assumptions evolve into taken for granted beliefs, the existing culture within that organization will then define for current and emerging generations of members the types of leadership styles and behaviors that are accepted.<sup>60</sup> Organizational culture also helps explain why some military organizations continue to pursue ways of warfare that are incompatible with emerging or prevailing strategic and operational realities, and why some resist change.<sup>61</sup> If senior Army leaders fail or refuse to recognize the need for change, any proposal for change is doomed to failure.<sup>62</sup> In short, Army culture belongs to the Army, and only Army leaders can influence the type of change required to embed mission command as an underlying assumption in Army culture.<sup>63</sup>

Schein ascertains that culture can be analyzed at several levels, with the term “level” meaning the degree to which the cultural phenomenon is visible to the observer.<sup>64</sup> He identifies three levels of culture: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions. Artifacts, the first level, include the visible products of an organization such as the architecture of its physical environment; its language; its

technology and products; its style, as embodied in clothing, manners of address, emotional displays, and myths and stories about the organization; its observable rituals and ceremonies.<sup>65</sup> This level of culture is easy to observe but very difficult to decipher.<sup>66</sup>

Espoused beliefs and values, the second level, are unwritten rules and norms that govern and guide day-to-day behavior.<sup>67</sup> While artifacts may be easy to observe, norms and values are not. Values are more conscious than basic assumptions but are not usually embedded in the minds of group members.<sup>68</sup> Norms are closely associated with values and are unwritten rules that allow members to understand and perceive what is expected of them in a wide variety of situations.<sup>69</sup> Beliefs and values at the conscious level guide behavior.<sup>70</sup> However, if beliefs and values do not stem from prior learning, they may also reflect what Argyris and Schon refer to as “espoused theories.”<sup>71</sup> These theories help predict what people overtly say in a variety of situations and may be out of line with what they will actually do in situations in which those beliefs and values should in fact dictate.<sup>72</sup> Espoused beliefs and values often leave large areas of behavior unexplained.<sup>73</sup>

Basic underlying assumptions, the third level, reflect a marked preference for particular solutions to problems, adopted based on individual and group experiences in an organization.<sup>74</sup> In fact, if a basic assumption takes root in a group, members will find behavior based on any other premise inconceivable.<sup>75</sup> For example, an organizational assumption that suggests subordinates are incapable of independent judgment will manifest in strong procedural controls.<sup>76</sup> But, procedural changes will be insufficient to change behavior if unaccompanied by a corresponding change of the basic assumptions.<sup>77</sup> According to Schein, a central problem faced by military organizations

attempting to adopt mission command can be traced to the second and third levels: espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions.<sup>78</sup> As long as these remain unaltered, so will the organizational behavior.<sup>79</sup>

### A Model for Changing Culture

When a gap between “theory in use” and “espoused theory” generate dysfunction, leaders must identify and steer a course for change.<sup>80</sup> While leaders are the catalyst for change, the institution itself may be an obstacle. If an organization has a long history of success based on certain assumptions about itself and the environment, it will probably not challenge those assumptions.<sup>81</sup> Schein further cautions, “even if the assumptions are brought to consciousness, members of an organization are likely to hold onto them because they justify the past and are a source of pride and self-esteem.”<sup>82</sup> The Army is an institution steeped in tradition and success, and according to Schein, this type of culture is reluctant to change. However, Schein presents a model for systemically embedding and transmitting a culture.<sup>83</sup> Embedding and reinforcing mechanisms are tools that can enable true change.<sup>84</sup> Embedding mechanisms root assumptions into an organization and reinforcing mechanisms support or reinforce embedded assumptions. For the purpose of this discussion, all of Schein’s embedding mechanisms are applicable, but only two reinforcing mechanisms seem relevant to a conversation about mission command.

The first embedding mechanism is what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis—in other words, what they *deal with systemically*.<sup>85</sup> This embedding mechanism, clearly communicates priorities, goals and assumptions.<sup>86</sup> Leaders who consistently use powerful forms of communication understand their merits; those who do not, create organizations that waste energy attempting to understand a

leader's behavior.<sup>87</sup> If a leader's pattern of attention is inconsistent, subordinates will draw their own conclusions as to what is important, leading to a diverse set of assumptions within an organization.<sup>88</sup> For example, the focus of the current Army Chief of Staff on the treatment of traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress communicates a powerful message to the organization. As a result, leaders understand the importance of providing care and assistance to Soldiers with these types of injuries.

The second embedding mechanism is how leaders react to critical incidents and organizational crisis. These types of circumstances and events are especially significant in culture creation because heightened emotional involvement during such periods increases the intensity of learning.<sup>89</sup> How will senior military and civilian leaders respond to the current fiscal crisis? Will they give ultimatums; provide options, or join the political fray with warnings of the dire consequences of sequestration? What message will they send to the military, the public, and adversaries? How will they respond to increased incidents of high-risk behavior, and how will they manage training requirements in an era of fiscal constraint? The answers to these questions provide insights into how leaders will manage the type of complex environments previously described in this research effort.

The third embedding mechanism is how leaders allocate resources. This mechanism is particularly important in today's environment and relates closely to the previous example. Given impending budget cuts, senior leaders face difficult choices with regard to the allocation of resources that provide subordinates the maximum degree of flexibility and autonomy to develop and implement innovative training programs. These choices will prove decisive in fully implementing mission command,

and senior leaders must be willing to assume risk, accept mistakes, and influence outcomes through active and participatory leadership.

The fourth embedding mechanism is a leader's use of deliberate role-modeling, teaching, and coaching. The Army's hedge against an uncertain future relies on the education of Soldiers and leaders. Leaders have no greater responsibility than developing the future Army. Schein points out a critical aspect of role modeling, "there is a difference between the message delivered from staged settings and when the leader is observed informally."<sup>90</sup> If a leader espouses mission command but exercises constraining oversight of resources and training programs, they are in fact not modeling behavior and beliefs consistent with mission command.

The fifth embedding mechanism is how leaders allocate rewards and status. Members of an organization learn what an organization values and punishes from their own experience with promotions, from performance appraisals, and through discussions with senior leaders.<sup>91</sup> The Army rewards certain behavior, and embeds the underlying assumption that leader attributes, skills, and actions included in the officer evaluation report and assessments by the rater(s) are important in the Army. Absent among these metrics are attributes that are integral to mission command, such as open mindedness and empowerment of subordinates. To reiterate the basic point, if leaders want to make mission command a part of Army culture, they must create a reward, promotion, and status system that promotes it.<sup>92</sup>

The final embedding mechanism is how leaders recruit, select, promote, and excommunicate personnel. It is clear that initial selection decisions for new members, followed by criteria applied in the promotion system, are powerful mechanisms for

embedding and perpetuating culture.<sup>93</sup> Basic assumptions are further reinforced through criteria for who gets promoted, who is retired early, and who is fired or given a job that is seen as less important.<sup>94</sup> The last few Army Chiefs' of Staff frequently espoused the need for broadened strategic leaders. However, an examination of the last several lieutenant colonel board results, with particular focus on the Infantry branch, demonstrates the opposite.

A decade of war has reinforced existing cultural trends stemming from the embedded assumption that emphasizes “muddy-boots experience” as a critical factor in promotion and selection processes. This assumption skews selection practices in favor of combat-centric assignments.<sup>95</sup> Over the last two years, all infantry battalion commander-selects averaged 36 months in key developmental assignments as a major and 36 months as a captain, with just fewer than four percent having a joint duty assignment.<sup>96</sup> Few had assignments external to Brigade Combat Teams (BCT); aide-de-camp was the most common broadening assignment.<sup>97</sup> The scope of time demonstrates the disparity, as officers in each grade-plate served upwards of eighty percent of their developmental time within the BCT.<sup>98</sup> These statistics demonstrate a gap between “espoused theory” and “theory in use”, and clearly represent a culture that significantly favors muddy-boots experience. More importantly, these types of selection processes prevent the Army from benefiting from a wider array of diverse leaders in critical command positions that bring a broad collection of views and methods to strategic planning, problem solving, and decision-making. These types of leaders are more likely to embrace divergent views, and provide greater opportunities for subordinates to exercise initiative, thus further embedding mission command over time.



While embedding mechanisms are one aspect of change, Schein highlights the importance of secondary or reinforcing mechanisms.<sup>99</sup> The first reinforcing mechanism is organizational design and structure. The initial design of an organization and periodic reorganizations provide ample opportunities for leaders to embed deeply held assumptions about the task, the means to accomplish it, the nature of the people, and the types of relationships to foster among people.<sup>100</sup>

Senior leaders recognize that network enabled operations are required to defeat adaptive and innovative adversaries that use network type operations to pursue goals and objectives. In some ways, the Army and the Joint Force have consolidated capabilities to meet this challenge. In particular, the special operations community has evolved from traditional structures and regionally aligned capabilities in support of Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC), to interagency and allied special-operations partners to establish a global SOF network which is able to operate rapidly and effectively. Another impending organizational change, the Regionally Aligned Force concept, will potentially require the Army to employ smaller footprints in specific regions in support of GCC requirements. This will place a greater reliance on small unit leaders that can operate effectively with ample resources within stated intent—which is the essence of mission command.

While military and civilian leaders are moving to right-size all staffs, the large composition of most Army headquarters provides another example of how Army culture is misaligned and at odds with mission command. Perhaps former Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, put it best, “one need only spend 10 minutes walking around the Pentagon or any major military headquarters to see excess and redundancy.”<sup>101</sup> For

example, the size of the Joint Chiefs of Staff office has more than tripled to 4,244 in 2012 from 1,313 in 2010, according to the Pentagon's annual manpower report.<sup>102</sup> Some of this growth occurred when the Joint Staff absorbed Joint Forces Command, but clear excess is readily apparent.

The second reinforcing mechanism focuses on organizational systems and procedures. The most visible parts of life in any organization are the daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual cycles of routines, procedures, reports, forms, and other recurrent collaborative sessions.<sup>103</sup> Systems and procedures used to establish these sessions make life predictable and thereby reduce ambiguity and anxiety.<sup>104</sup> Standard operating procedures and policies, while important, should guide and provide context for operations, as opposed to dictate them. At times, an overreliance on Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and policies can constrain individual initiative and innovation. This is particularly evident in garrison environments strongly guided by dated policies and procedures that along with micro-management by leaders provide constraining oversight of operations. In order to reinforce mission command, leaders must understand the need to exert influence through intent, and empower subordinates to meet desired outcomes in both garrison and operational environments.

Embedding and reinforcing mechanisms are powerful ways to embed and reinforce assumptions in organizations if leaders are able to control them.<sup>105</sup> All of these mechanisms communicate culture.<sup>106</sup> Leaders must understand that they do not have a choice about whether to communicate. Rather they must determine what they wish to communicate, and manage the means in order to send desired messages.<sup>107</sup>

## State of the Army Profession Today

There is a lack of congruence between Army organizational culture and an inclination to fully embrace the tenants of mission command.<sup>108</sup> A survey conducted at the Army War College involving 533 students from the Classes of 2003 and 2004, revealed Army culture is characterized by an overarching desire for stability and control.<sup>109</sup> It is reliant on formal rules and policies, coordination and efficiency, achieving goal and results, and hard driving competitiveness.<sup>110</sup> However, the same survey found that future strategic leaders believe Army culture should represent a profession that emphasizes flexibility and discretion, participation, human resource development, innovation and creativity, risk-taking, long-term emphasis on professional growth, and the acquisition of new professional knowledge and skills.<sup>111</sup> This study is even more relevant as many of these officers now fill the senior ranks of our military today, and are the stewards of leading and managing the Army profession.

The Army's historical culture embodies a zero defect mentality.<sup>112</sup> It has influenced officers to "cover up" bad news, and potentially falsify reports, which further fuels a lack of trust in the profession.<sup>113</sup> The fear of mistake or failure causes a climate that fosters risk aversion and fear of uncertainty, traits that increase with rank.<sup>114</sup> When subordinate leaders emulate behavior displayed by senior leaders this aversion is affirmed.<sup>115</sup>

Careerism, a zero-defect focus and the accompanying micromanagement, coupled with an attitude of not accepting defeat or quitting until mission complete, further characterizes Army culture.<sup>116</sup> Although this is cause for concern, the deployed Army of the past decade displays a propensity to embrace the culture of mission command. Young leaders, who thrived in an empowered environment and

demonstrated flexibility to act within the commanders' intent, will fill our senior Army ranks in the decade to come. The next step is for current senior Army leaders to fully understand the importance of mission command, and to foster a culture that facilitates its employment.

### Recommendations

In a recent white paper, GEN Dempsey stated, "mission command must be institutionalized and operationalized into all aspects of the joint force, our doctrine, our education, our training and our manpower and personnel processes."<sup>117</sup> Analysis indicates a need for culture change, which can be promoted by specifically modifying education and training programs, and identifying through personnel management systems, the most talented, broadened, and adaptive leaders. As technology continues to move at an accelerated pace, the need to balance command and control with mission command is readily apparent. Current doctrine establishes the framework to understand the use of mission command; however the Army must develop, communicate, and implement a more comprehensive way ahead. In pursuit of the stated goals of institutionalizing and operationalizing mission command into all aspects of the force, this research effort provides the following recommendations for consideration:

- Continue to advocate concepts contained in the Army Learning Concept for 2015 (ALC 2015) that emphasize the necessary integration of self-development, institutional instruction, and operational experience.<sup>118</sup>
- Convert most classroom experiences into collaborative problem-solving events led by facilitators (vice instructors) who engage learners to think and understand the relevance and context of what they learn.

- Tailor learning to the individual learner's experience and competence level based on the results of a pre-test and/or assessment.
- Dramatically reduce or eliminate instructor-led slide presentation lectures and begin using a blended learning approach that incorporates virtual and constructive simulations, gaming technology, and other technology-delivered instruction.
- Ensure education and training programs enable culture and language development; replicate operational conditions associated with full-spectrum operations; and encourage adaptability, decentralized operations and mastering the requisite fundamentals required to manage garrison training programs.
- Emphasize the importance of developing the cognitive, interpersonal, and cultural skills necessary to make sound judgments in complex environments at all levels (tactical through strategic).
- Develop training models that are adaptive and capable of updating learning content rapidly, and that are responsive to operational needs.
- Ensure training programs and models are tailored to an increasingly diverse population of Soldiers.
- Develop innovative techniques to provide field grade and senior officers the skills required to develop and train junior leaders who need different approaches to learning based on generational differences.
- Strike a careful balance between simulation and physical training in a manner that exploits the experiences of a decade of war.

- Encourage senior commanders to apply the principles of mission command in articulating intent to drive the execution of garrison operations.
- Provide junior leaders the education and training required to become proficient in training management, property accountability, counseling, and high risk Soldier management, and that enable them to apply the myriad of organizational resources designed to assist Soldiers struggling from the consequences of a decade of war.
- Encourage senior commanders to delegate authority in a manner that enables them to retain authority, while simultaneously sharing responsibility with subordinates.
- Use checklists, SOPs and policy letters in garrison environments to inform intent rather than dictating execution.
- Establish an Army wide climate that is less risk adverse and is willing to underwrite mistakes made by leaders exercising initiative.
- Continue to advocate and employ after action reviews to enable comprehensive learning across the force.
- Emphasize the importance of senior leaders understanding when to employ centralized planning required to execute complex combined arms maneuver types of operations, such as brigade level air assaults, while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of decentralized operations.
- Issue explicit board and promotion guidance which places greater emphasis on the importance of broadening assignments.

## Conclusion

Mission command is a complex, elusive and multi-factorial phenomenon that is not easily quantified or measured.<sup>119</sup> Evidence suggests the Army has not been able to institutionalize mission command.<sup>120</sup> On the positive side, while mission command has not fully taken root, it has been a driver for significant advancements in the realms of doctrinal development, officer training and education, and actual battlefield performance.<sup>121</sup>

We can't wake up one morning and decide we are going to implement mission-type orders.<sup>122</sup> Cultures develop over long periods, and we must practice mission-type orders every day, and in everything we do as an Army.<sup>123</sup> As the Army enters into a challenging new era characterized by fiscal constraints, reduced force structures and a force strained by a decade of persistent conflict, the ability to continue to apply mission command is critical.

We cannot yet determine our current leaders' commitment to changing the culture.<sup>124</sup> But we know that meaningful and necessary change depends on their commitment and willingness to apply embedding and reinforcing mechanisms to facilitate mission command.<sup>125</sup> We will spend billions of dollars researching how to improve the network, but it will mean little if we don't focus our energies on command climates and environments that develop the human foundation—trust, initiative, dialogue and freedom of action within intent—that will allow mission command to take root.<sup>126</sup> If we intend to truly embrace mission command, then we should do it to the fullest, and that will require commitment to changing a culture influenced by control and process to one dominated by decentralization and trust.<sup>127</sup>

## Endnotes

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, 1-1.

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<sup>24</sup> Flanagan and Schear, *Security Challenges*, 19.

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